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Course II Essay

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INTRODUCTION

As the first war of the Nuclear Age, the Korean War was unique in many aspects. One aspect of its uniqueness was the open debate between President Truman and General MacArthur concerning the war's military and political objectives. Another unique aspect was rapid fluctuations in the military situation. These characteristics facilitate the analysis of the relationship between political purpose of war and military objectives.

Though Clausewitz discussed this relationship in his book, On War, his thoughts alone were not enough to completely understand this important relationship. Throughout On War, Clausewitz offered a large number of examples to illustrate many of his points. However concerning the relationship between political purpose and military objectives, there are none. The lack of examples is understandable considering the closed and obscure nature of politics in Clausewitz's time which to a degree still exists today. Often political purposes are not openly or at least clearly stated, and as such they are the cause of much debate. The unique openness of the Korean War allows an analysis of the United States' political and military objectives that illuminates this relationship that Clausewitz found so critical. This paper will use examples from the Korean war to illustrate the nature of this relationship.

Clausewitz Theory

Clausewitz developed the important relationship between politics and war by emphasizing three subtly different elements of this relationship. The first was the primacy of politics. "... War is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means" (Clausewitz, p69). As a continuation of political purposes, war follows the initial efforts of diplomacy. Though the failure of these initial efforts results in war, waging war does not require the suspension of politics. In fact, politics continues.

The second element is the moderating influence of politics on the conduct of the war. "Since War is not an act of senseless passion but is controlled by its political object, the value of this object must determine the sacrifices to be made for it in magnitude and duration. Once the expenditure of the effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow" (Clausewitz, p92). The implication is that war has the tendency to escalate until it is nothing more than meaningless violence. Politics controls the tendency of war to escalate and provides it a beginning and an end.

The third element is the interaction between political purpose and military objectives. This interaction is most intriguing

ing and gives an almost dynamic quality to the relationship. Clausewitz suggests this dynamic quality by indicating that political purpose is not a fixed beacon or in his words "a tyrant" that is unchanging (Clausewitz, p87). Both parts of this relationship are paradoxical to a degree. Harry Summers implied the paradox when he wrote "For both domestic and international political purposes the civilian leaders want maximum flexibility and maneuverability and are hesitant to fix objectives. The military on the other hand need just such a firm objective as early as possible in order to plan and conduct military operations" (Summers, p117). This paradoxical relationship is resolved through dialogue between the politician and commander. Clausewitz did not specify how political purpose and military objectives would be aligned. However, he alluded to the process by saying "We can see that the assertion that a major military development, or the plan for one, should be a matter for purely military opinion is unacceptable and can be damaging. Nor indeed is it sensible to summon soldiers as many governments do when they are planning a war, and ask them for purely military advice" (Clausewitz, p607). The dialogue between President Truman and General MacArthur during the Korean War illustrate the dynamics between political purpose and military objectives.

Korean War Examples

For the purposes of this discussion, the Korean War is separated into four phases, Post Invasion, Post Inchon Landing, Post China Involvement, and Post MacArthur. During each phase, distinctly different political purposes and military objectives developed. Before the war, the United States was preoccupied with containing the Soviet Union in Europe. Our concerns in Asia seemed to go no further than Japan. "On 12 January 1950, Secretary of State Acheson spoke to the National Press Club in Washington. During the speech it came to public light that neither Korea nor Taiwan were within the United States' security cordon" (Fehrenbach, p52). When North Korea indicated on 8 June 1950 its intention to reunify Korea by 15 August 1950 the United States ignored the implication (Fehrenbach, p11).

The first phase of the war began with the invasion of South Korea on 24 June 1950. On 27 June with United States leadership, the U.N. called its members to assist the Republic of Korea in repelling the attack and restoring the border (Fehrenbach, p86). President Truman affirming his containment policy authorized General MacArthur to use U.S. forces in Korea, but warned against antagonizing direct involvement by China and the Soviet Union (Fehrenbach, p87). The initial political purpose of the war was to restore the Korean border with direct force. General

MacArthur quickly engaged two divisions under his command to stop the North Korean invasion. The military situation was very much in doubt as the North Korean forces pushed towards Pusan. It was not until the successful landing at Inchon on 15 September 1950 that the United Nations forces began to reverse the attack. The Inchon landing had achieved the initial political purpose of restoring the border and pushed the war into its next phase.

The Post Inchon Landing Phase was greatly influenced by the astounding success of the military operation. The political objectives were significantly modified to exploit this success. On 27 September 1950, the President instructed General MacArthur to destroy all North Korean forces, unify North and South Korea, and determine if Chinese or Soviet intervention was likely (Fehrenbach, p273). The modest political objectives of restoring the original border reflected the tenuous military situation of stopping the advancing North Koreans. However these modest political objectives gave way to a more ambitious political purpose of unifying the Korean peninsula when military success seemed to make that possible. On 2 October, the Soviet Union proposed a cease-fire and the withdrawal of all foreign troops (Fehrenbach, p276). This proposal would have achieved the initial political purpose of the war. Yet it was not accepted by the United States. In Asia, it appears that the policy of containment was replaced with a policy of reduction. The military objectives

were to attack across the 38th parallel and advance to the Yalu River, the border between China and North Korea.

The Post Chinese Involvement Phase began as United Nations forces crossed the 38th parallel. "On 1 October, Chou En-lai told the Indian Ambassador that China would intervene if the United States or United Nations forces crossed the 38th Parallel. We will not take this action if only South Korean troops cross the border" (Fehrenbach, p281). Message was delivered to the United States which only passed it along to General MacArthur for his consideration. Interestingly, Fehrenbach points out that Chinese intervention was a political question and implies that it was not an appropriate question for MacArthur. However, Clausewitz indicates that commanders should be involved in political discussions. The better point is that MacArthur did not answer the question from a political perspective. His answer only considered the military perspective of intervention. At this point the dialogue between the politician and commander broke down. If the dialogue had continued fully assessing the political and military implications of Chinese intervention, they might have averted the military disaster that occurred in October 1950. The Chinese drove the United Nations forces back across the 38th parallel. The military setback of October forced another change in the political objectives of the war. On 30 November, President Truman indicated that our objective was to stop the aggression (Fehrenbach, p398). As stated earlier political purpose

moderates military objectives; similarly, military setbacks moderates political objectives.

The Post MacArthur phase of the war actually began four months before General MacArthur was relieved from his command. It was at that time that the disagreement over the appropriate political objectives of the war reached an impass. In December 1950, MacArthur saw two possible courses for the war. His preference was to enlarge the conflict. An acceptable alternative was to negotiate an armistice that restored the 38th parallel as the border (Fehrenbach, p405). MacArthur rejected continuing the war in its stalemate form. Politically, Truman rejected enlarging the conflict and preferred a negotiated settlement that restored the 38th parallel border. On the surface, these two positions are very similar. However, the impass concerns the means to achieve the settlement. MacArthur apparently thought that the negotiated settlement was a political problem that should not be advanced by a military stalemate. Truman apparently thought that a negotiated settlement was not possible without continued resistance on a limited basis. These differences continued until the end of March 1951. On 20 March, President Truman informed MacArthur that he was not to advance north of the 38th parallel to allow negotiations to settle the conflict (Fehrenbach, p410). Four days later, MacArthur issued a pronouncement that threatened the Chinese with escalation unless they agreed to settle the conflict (Fehrenbach, p413). The dia-

logue between the commander and the politician had reached an end when President Truman relieved General MacArthur on 11 April 1951.

Conclusion

Clausewitz saw value in Commanders offering political advice to political leaders (Clausewitz, p607). That advice is a critical part of the dialogue that assures the proper alignment between political purpose and military objectives. The subject of the dialogue between the commander and the politician is the appropriate political purpose of the war and the military objectives that support that purpose. In terms of Clausewitz, MacArthur was not quarrelling about the influence of politics on the war, but was quarrelling with the policy itself (Clausewitz, p608). The necessity of this dialogue is indicated by Clausewitz statement, "The Commander is entitled to require that the trends and designs of policy shall not be inconsistent with these means" (Clausewitz, p 87).

The relationship between the political purpose of war and the military objectives is paradoxical. The paradox is illustrated by the situation in which the commander ask the politician, "What are the political objectives of the war?" and the politician replies by asking the commander, "What can the military accomplish?". Though military objectives are necessarily

subordinate to the political purpose of the war, the success or failure of military action can influence the magnitude of the political purpose. Essentially the relationship must match political ends to military means.

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